



Fathers MATTER TOO



**Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition
Annual Report January 2008**

POLK COUNTY FATHERS AND FAMILIES COALITION
Dedicated to creating a community where all children grow up in strong, healthy
relationships with their parents.

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Fathers Matter Too

Fatherlessness Crisis - Did you know that more than 24 million kids live without their fathers? In any given year more than 9 million of these kids will not see their fathers or know his identity at all. According to a Gallop Poll, the most significant family, or social problem facing America is the physical absence of the father from the home.

Fatherlessness is most associated with out-of-wedlock births and divorce. Granted, these are two of the most notorious factors, however incarcerated fathers is rapidly gaining ground. In the United States, there is an estimated 1 million or more fathers in prison.

The cost of fatherlessness is high. Statistics show that fatherless kids are more likely to:

- Drop out of school.
- Become involved in drug and alcohol abuse.
- Girls are more likely to become pregnant as teens.
- Boys are more likely to commit violent crimes.

Iowa has experienced an alarming increase in births to unwed parents. Child support has seen its caseload increase by 19% since 1997. In Iowa, according to the 2000 Census – there are 64,367 households (17%) with children under age 18 with no father present. Of total births in 2005, 12,757 or 32% were out of wedlock births. For 2006, child support reports 184,197 total cases representing 179,114 children with over \$1.044 billion in unpaid child support. In 2006, 11,748 children spent at least one day in foster care. The average cost of a child in the first year of care is \$9,000.

Divorced parents are more consistent in their child support payments, due to their bonded relationships with their children and their understanding of the financial requirements for maintaining a household. Unmarried parents show less consistent payment patterns, tend to be less bonded to their children, and have minimal understanding of the financial security their children need. Child support data for federal fiscal year 2005 for cases in which the child was born in a marriage shows that the average support order was \$219 per month and the rate of current support received was 72% (average of \$157.68). For cases in which the child was born outside of marriage, the average support amount was \$147 and the rate of current support was 58% (average of \$85.26).

In Polk County

In 2000 – 19% of all households (9,733) with children under 18 had no father present.

In 2004 – 30% or 1,897 of all births were out of wedlock.

In 2006 – there were 20,674 cases representing 32,048 children with over \$88 million in unpaid child support.

In 2006 – 1,457 children spent at least one day in foster care with an annual cost of \$16 million.

In 2005 – Polk County spent \$8.9 million on 1,097 juvenile detention holds, 525 juveniles were held for more than a week.

Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition

The Polk County Fathers and Families Coalition is composed of representatives from business, faith and community based organizations, human service agencies, corrections, education, and Head Start. With the support of Head Start and community groups, several trainings and workshops have been offered on various topics related to parenting, fatherhood and relationships. Through grant funding with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and in partnership with Making Connections and the YMCA of Greater Des Moines, the Coalition has initiated the Fatherhood Initiative to link fathers with the support they need to be positively involved in the lives of their children. This includes providing physical, emotional, and financial support to their children and developing and maintaining a positive relationship with the mother of their children.

Mission Statement and Future Goals –The mission of the Fathers and Families Coalition is to create a community where all children grow up in strong, healthy relationships with their parents. It is the intent of the Coalition to design and implement community-based programming and strategies that will reverse the trend of fatherlessness in Polk County. By intervening early in the life of a fractured family, there is a greater likelihood of achieving the mission and the objectives of this initiative:

- Preventing long-term or permanent estrangement of the parent from the child.
- Increasing the level of involvement that separated parents maintain with their children.
- Preventing the accumulation of severe child support arrearages.
- Improving payment of child support in full, on time, every month.
- Increasing awareness of and access to community resources.
- Improving the physical, emotional, and financial support of children.

The Fatherhood Initiative

This new project kicked off in February 2007, striving to create a support network for recently separated or divorced families and to specifically assist fathers through the development of individualized service plans to remain connected to their children.

Key issues being addressed include:

- Early intervention when a new child support case is opened to improve communication and relationships that will improve payment of support, reduce or avoid accumulation of debt, and increase the father's involvement with the child.
- Identification of barriers to supporting their children and identifying solutions. These barriers may include: work/employment, alcohol and drug abuse, physical and mental health issues, domestic violence, housing, and training/skill levels.
- Lack of visitation and access to their children for many fathers.
- Assistance with communication and relationships skills that may result in reuniting the family and avoidance of establishing a child support case.
- Community awareness to promote a culture change to support fathers and encourage more positive press about fathers, inclusion of fathers in education

and social services, and maintaining healthy relationships for children with incarcerated fathers.

- Provision of: outreach, parenting classes for dads, and training for workers and supervisors, training and life skills, establishing a network/collaboration of community resources and services, and employment services that go beyond entry-level and include career advancement.

Through connections and collaboration with Iowan's for Social and Economic Development (ISED) and the Department of Corrections (DOC), the target population was expanded to include men who are re-entering the Making Connections neighborhoods from prison who owe back child support.

During 2007, 110 fathers have participated in the Fatherhood Initiative. In addition to providing case management services, fathering classes were held once a week. The 12-week series includes sessions on health, child development, housing, financial stability, substance abuse, racism, and the importance of being involved in your child's life physically, emotionally, and financially. Nine men have graduated, completing the entire series.

Through case management services, fathers' needs are assessed, and then matched with services and resources in the community such as job training, legal advice, parenting education, mentoring, child support case management, financial literacy, and character building.

In July 2007, an Open House was held to expose fathers to the various resources available through this initiative. Fathers were invited to meet with representatives from financial counseling, Child Support Recovery, and the DMACC Urban Campus.

Prairie Meadows funding has allowed us to begin offering community-based programming and activities that are available to all fathers in the Making Connections neighborhoods. On Sunday afternoons the Fatherhood Initiative hosts "Every Sunday is Fathers Day" at the John R. Grubb YMCA. This weekly activity offers fathers a child-friendly activity or craft, along with refreshments, at no charge.

Other efforts include: reconnecting fathers with their children after they leave prison, and providing father-friendly services for men involved in the child welfare system, specifically a fatherhood parenting class.

The Fatherhood Initiative has formed relationships with:

- Child Support Recovery, a unit of the Iowa Department of Human Services, to find more effective ways to handle child support expectations,
- ISED Ventures to help men organize their financial responsibilities and assist them with their tax preparations,
- Visiting Nurse Services and the Young Women's Resource Center to better connect new and expectant fathers with supports,
- Neighborhood Health Initiative and the DMACC Keys program to help fathers find better paying jobs.

Partners involved with this initiative are Making Connections, Child Support Recovery, Department of Human Services' protective services, Parents as Partners, Neighborhood Health Initiative, Young Women's Resource Center, Family Violence Center, Visiting Nurses Services (VNS), Institute for Social and Economic Development (ISED), Iowa Department of Corrections, DMACC, and Iowa State University.

Sponsors

Annie E. Casey Foundation
Polk County Community Development Grant
Prairie Meadows Grant
Mid-America Commercial Real Estate
Principal Financial Group Foundation
EMC Insurance Companies
Mid-America Group
Wells Fargo
West Bancorporation Foundation, Inc.
Greater Des Moines Community Foundation



Fatherhood Outreach and Collaborative Efforts

Contempt Alternative/Parenting Program

In collaboration with the Fifth Judicial District, the Child Support Recovery Unit works with individuals facing contempt of court charges for failure to pay child support. The project coordinator works with participants to identify barriers prohibiting them from having a healthy relationship with their children. In turn, participants will overcome those barriers enabling them to provide financial, medical and emotional support for their children.

To date, there have been more than 111 participants with a total of 220 child support cases. Participants are making monthly payments for about 64% of those cases. They have avoided over 7353 days of imposed jail sentences by continuing to make regular child support payments. In September 2007, more than \$42,000 was paid toward their obligations. Currently, the average collections total over \$14,000 per month.

Partnership with the Iowa Department of Corrections

In the spring of 2008, the Child Support Recovery Unit and the Department of Corrections will begin a collaborative effort to reduce the accumulation of large amounts of child support inmates owe upon release. The correctional system's intake center will assist inmates with the process of applying for a child support review. Child Support will simplify the child support review form as well as develop a CD regarding child support modifications to place in every prison. The Annie E. Casey Foundation is funding the CD. Additionally, the two agencies are developing a plan to have a child support point of contact person at each prison.

Parents as Partners

The Iowa Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services launched the Parents as Partners program in 2007. The

mentoring program matches parents who had their child removed with parents who successfully reunified with their child for at least one year. The program currently operates in three locations in Iowa and has two fathers as mentors. An effort to increase representation of fathers is being made.

Parental Obligation Pilot Projects (POPP)

The Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit offers startup grants in collaboration with Decategorization and Empowerment community groups for pilot projects. These Parental Obligation Pilot Projects help non-custodial parents meet their parental obligations to support their children both personally and financially and avoid disruption in the family

relationships. The grants are funded through the federal TANF block grant as authorized by the General Assembly. Types of services offered include: parent/child activities, parental skills training, mediation, legal assistance/referral, financial counseling, and fathers support groups.

Access and Visitation Grants

The Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit receives federal funds for services to facilitate access and visitation for non-custodial parents. Private not-for-profit agencies provide services designed to increase compliance with the child access provisions of court orders, including but not limited to providing neutral exchange sites, visitation counseling, and mediation services. There are three funded projects: Girls and Boys Town serving Pottawattamie County (through July 1, 2008); Youth and Shelter Services, Inc. serving Marshall County (through July 1, 2008); and Bethany for Children and Families serving Scott, Clinton, Jackson and Muscatine Counties (through June 30, 2009).

Partnership with the Iowa Attorney General's Office

The Bureau of Collections maintains a partnership with the Attorney General's Office to promote greater awareness of the need to pay child support. The program focuses on the importance of parents staying involved in their child's life both financially and emotionally even



when they are not always physically able to be there.

The activities of this public awareness program include radio and television public service announcements; educational packets on the responsibilities of parenthood, especially financial responsibility, distributed to schools; and the “Step Up to the Plate” program in partnership with Iowa’s minor league baseball teams to honor parents who pay child support.

Iowa Fatherhood Website

The Iowa Department of Human Services’ Iowa Fatherhood website (<http://www.dhs.state.ia.us/fatherhood/>) was created to give any parent easy access to information that will help them be actively and positively involved with their children. This site contains links to a variety of other sites with Iowa, regional or national importance.

Community Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Grant Program

The Iowa Department of Human Services, Division of Child and Family Services utilizes federal TANF funds to provide grants to community agencies and organizations to develop or expand programs aimed at preventing teenage pregnancies. Several of the grantees provide programming to adolescent

males to either prevent early fatherhood or to assist young fathers in developing appropriate life skills. Program services are typically focused in the areas of education, intervention, and community education.

Child Welfare Efforts to Increase Awareness

In June 2007, the Polk County Human Services region presented training to staff entitled, “Engaging Fathers in Child Welfare”. Information was presented to service area managers and leadership staff regarding the importance of fathers and engaging them.

Agency Examination of Responsible Fatherhood

In July 2007, the Iowa Department of Human Services formed a committee to examine how it could support responsible fatherhood and the resources it would need. Subsequently, a public survey was done in order to ascertain the needs of fathers and to gather input on how the Iowa Department of Human Services can be more supportive of them as fathers. The survey was conducted between October 24, 2007 and November 21, 2007. The committee is examining options and resources needed for supporting responsible fatherhood within its existing service delivery system as well as examining potential innovative strategies.

